

South Dakota National Guard

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National Guard unit honored during deployment ceremony

RAPID CITY, S.D. – Family, friends and colleagues gathered at the “Shire of Democracy,” Mount Rushmore National Memorial, July 17, for a deployment ceremony in honor of the South Dakota Army National Guard’s 216th Engineer Detachment (Firefighting Team).

Supporters of the unit assembled at the monument’s amphitheater under the faces of past presidents to say farewell to the three Soldiers of Rapid City-based 216th as they depart for a nine-month tour to Romania.

“On behalf of all of South Dakota, I thank you for your service, your courage, your willingness to step forward and protect that which gives us wonderful opportunities in America,” said Gov. Dennis Daugaard during the ceremony. “For that I thank you and I wish you Godspeed and God bless you.”

The mission of the 216th is to provide command and control of attached firefighting teams to provide fire protection of aviation assets, facilities and installations in the European Command area of operation.

Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States, this is the second mobilization for the 216th, which deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003-2005.

“One hundred years ago today, the South Dakota National Guard was completely mobilized during World War I, and 20 years after that it was again totally mobilized for Word War II,” said Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, SDNG adjutant general, to the audience. “Make no mistake about it, we have a three-man unit deploying overseas today. This is a big deal too. This is a part of our history and a part of our legacy that we are creating today.”

The unit will also deploy with three assigned Army National Guard firefighting teams from Hawaii, South Carolina and Idaho, as well as one active-duty Army unit. The 216th will report to Fort Bliss, Texas, to complete several weeks of theater-specific training prior to deployment overseas.

The unit’s commander, Capt. Jared Bloomgren, said the unit has been training hard for the past year to prepare for this deployment.

“My team’s readiness, as well as the other units that are going with, I definitely feel confident about the mission that is going to take place,” said Bloomgren. “We’ve known for over a year that the deployment is coming up and you have all this training that has to take place before you leave. We are prepared.”

After months of training, Sgt. 1st Class Austin Hagen, 216th fire chief, said he is ready to start the deployment, but is also poignant about leaving his family behind.

“Having command and control over other fire teams is something that we haven’t got a chance to do,” he said. “Getting an opportunity to perform our mission is something I’m excited about.”

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“We’re anxious, but we are ready to get it going,” continued Hagen. “It’s kind of a bittersweet moment for us – having to leave our families, but we are ready to get the deployment started. My family is very proud of me, and I have a huge support system. I appreciate my family and all they do.”

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High resolution photos are available at www.flickr.com/photos/southdakotationalguard



170717-Z-BB320-0001: Soldiers of the South Dakota Army National Guard’s 216th Engineer Detachment (Firefighting Team) stand for the unit roll call during the unit’s deployment ceremony at the Mount Rushmore National Memorial amphitheater, S.D., July 17, 2017. The Soldiers will deploy for about nine months to Romania in support of Operation Freedom’s Sentinel. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Mike Beck)



170717-Z-BB320-0002: Rapid City Mayor Steve Allender expresses his thanks to U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Robert Robertson and the Soldiers of the South Dakota Army National Guard’s 216th Engineer Detachment (Firefighting Team) during the unit’s deployment ceremony at the Mount Rushmore National Memorial amphitheater, S.D., July 17, 2017. The Soldiers will deploy for about nine months to Romania in support of Operation Freedom’s Sentinel. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Mike Beck)



170717-Z-BB320-0003: Gov. Dennis Daugaard expresses his thanks to U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Austin Hagen and the Soldiers of the South Dakota Army National Guard’s 216th Engineer Detachment (Firefighting Team) during the unit’s deployment ceremony at the Mount Rushmore National Memorial amphitheater, S.D., July 17, 2017. The Soldiers will deploy for about nine months to Romania in support of Operation Freedom’s Sentinel. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Mike Beck)



170717-Z-BB320-0004: U.S. Army Capt. Jared Bloomgren, commander of the 216th Engineer Detachment (Firefighting Team), South Dakota Army National Guard, addresses his Soldiers and the crowd gathered during the unit’s deployment ceremony at the Mount Rushmore National Memorial amphitheater, S.D., July 17, 2017. The Soldiers will deploy for about nine months to Romania in support of Operation Freedom’s Sentinel. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Mike Beck)



170717-Z-BB320-0005: U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Austin Hagen, fire chief of the 216th Engineer Detachment (Firefighting Team), South Dakota Army National Guard, holds his son during the unit’s deployment ceremony at the Mount Rushmore National Memorial amphitheater, S.D., July 17, 2017. The Soldiers will deploy for about nine months to Romania in support of Operation Freedom’s Sentinel. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Mike Beck)

FOR MORE INFORMATION, please contact the SDNG Public Affairs Office at (605) 737-6721 or e-mail ng.sd.sdarng.list.pao@mail.mil